

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW
Maundy Thursday Communion—April 17, 2014 –Matthew 5: 17
The Church of the Covenant

So in our study of the covenants in the Old and New Testaments we are left with a conundrum. Some of the Old Testament covenants like the one with Adam and the one with Moses are *conditional* covenants. Some of the Old Testament covenants like the one with Abraham, Noah and David are *unconditional* covenants. So is the NEW COVENANT, the covenant made through the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, is the NEW COVENANT conditional or unconditional????

The conditional covenants have covenants like the one made with Adam –**IF**, Adam, you abide by the one simple law I give you not to eat of the one tree in the Garden of Eden which I have prohibited you from eating, **THEN** you will live, live in paradise, and live forever. The conditional covenant of the LAW through Moses is an **IF-THEN** covenant. We read in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy the “blessings and the curses” of the law. The Lord God declares through Moses: “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God...and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God...” (Deuteronomy 11: 26) **IF** you obey, **THEN** you are blessed ----**IF** you disobey **THEN** you are cursed. This **IF-THEN** nature of the Old Testament Law is the very essence of a conditional covenant. Our obedience controls the outcome; our will can frustrate the will of the Almighty; our obedience controls our blessing or the loss thereof.

By contrast remember the UNCONDITIONAL covenants God makes with Abraham, Noah and David. God unilaterally promises to Abraham to make of him a great nation and to give him a land forever. There is no obedience required; God merely promises and on the basis of God’s action God Himself fulfills the covenant with Abraham. God unilaterally promises to Noah that He will never destroy the earth again and makes an “everlasting covenant” with Noah and his descendants, which include us. There is no obedience required; God makes and keeps the promise Himself; God Himself fulfills the promise and the relationship He has made with Noah. God unilaterally promises to King David that someone in his house and lineage will always sit upon the throne of Israel. There is no obedience required by David or his progeny; God promises and fulfills that promise Himself. There is nothing which Abraham, Noah or David do in order to appease and satisfy God; God does it for them. There is nothing that Abraham, Noah or David give to God in order to make God happy so that God fulfills His promise to them; God just fulfills His promise because that is His very nature; to be true to His Word and promises; to fulfill the covenant He has made.

The prophet Jeremiah then predicts the coming of the NEW COVENANT, the one where the law is written upon His people’s heart, the one where God remembers the sin of His people no more, the one where God becomes their God and the people of God become His people. Jesus, in the text we will use in the communion service that follows, will say: “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood which is shed for the remission of sin”. Jesus, through His life and His death and His resurrection, through His life and through His blood, has made a NEW COVENANT with us. God through Jesus Christ has reached out to us in love. So is this NEW COVENANT conditional, like the law and covenant with Moses, or is it unconditional, like the unilateral promises God made to Abraham, Noah and David?

Now there is a lot on the line in the way we answer that question. If the NEW COVENANT is conditional, is like the Mosaic law, then we have to abide by the law, then there are many things we have to do in order to earn that relationship, then we have to have faith in order to have covenant, then we have to receive Jesus a particular way in order to be in relationship with God, then just like the law there is a

whole laundry list of things we have to do and be in order to be in relationship with God through the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. But if the NEW COVENANT is UN-conditional then there is nothing we can do to earn that relationship and there is nothing we can do or not do to lose that covenantal relationship. Indeed, it will be God Himself who enters into that relationship with us, and it is God who sustains that relationship with us by His own power and righteousness, and it is God who Himself fulfills all the just requirements of the relationship.

And there are a lot of Christians out there who want to place great burdens on people where a relationship with Jesus Christ is concerned. You have to receive Jesus a particular way. You have to live a life exactly this way or that way. You can't smoke or play cards or whatever, and Jesus won't relate to you if you do. You gotta be a good person first and then Jesus will enter into a covenant with you. They exact a standard of holiness in order to be in relationship with God through Jesus. This New Covenant view becomes filled with religiosity of a bunch of rules and requirements that you have to do and be in order to be in a right relationship with Jesus. The sign over this relationship is "Sinners need not apply".

So is the NEW COVENANT conditional or unconditional? And what does Jesus have to say about it?

Jesus' great commentary on the Mosaic Law is set forth in the Sermon on the Mount. He is commenting on the blessings and curses we just read in Deuteronomy. Is the NEW COVENANT about blessing or curse? Is the NEW COVENANT like the Mosaic Law or not? Jesus answers that question definitively when HE states: *"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them."* (Matthew 5: 17) He concludes this section by stating: *"unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven."* (v. 20) Sounds kind of like the old strict requirements of the law come back into play; nothing very new about the NEW COVENANT. But Jesus says HE has come not to abolish the law...but to fulfill them. How does Jesus fulfill the law???????

Consider now the cross on which Jesus died. Consider Calvary and the death HE died for us. The Lamb of God, which is who Jesus is, is the perfect sacrifice. He is the lamb without blemish. He is the sinless One. In perfect obedience to the will of His Father HE perfectly fulfills the plan of God. It is clear that humankind cannot hope to fulfill the just requirements of the law. "All we like sheep have gone astray." "There is not one righteous, no not one". "All have fallen short of the glory of God". So how can fallen humanity ever hope to fulfill the just requirements of the law? How can sinful and fallen people hope to receive blessing and not curse? How can eternal life lost in the Garden of Eden at the fall ever hope to be restored? Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice, in perfect obedience to the law, does something for us in love, not because we deserve it, not because we have earned it, not because we have worked ourselves up in knowledge or our own self righteousness, but purely and simply because God has done something for us, in love and through His Son that we cannot do for ourselves –perfectly and obediently fulfill the law of Moses. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law; Jesus fulfills in Himself at the cross and through the shedding of His own precious blood, what we could never hope to fulfill in and of ourselves. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law; Jesus one holy, perfect sacrifice fulfills the just demands of the law, once and for all. When Jesus is about to breath His last; when in perfect humility He has submitted Himself to the will of His Father in heaven; when out of a perfect love for us He chooses to die for us; Jesus cries out from the cross –*"It is finished."* "It is completed." "It is done." "It is accomplished." **IT IS FULFILLED.** I, the Lord Jesus Christ, have fulfilled the law and its requirements so that you, frail and flawed humanity do not have to try to do anymore what you could not have hoped to do anymore anyway. God did what only God could do. The NEW COVENANT is NEW because it fulfills all the

conditions of the Old Testament law through the blood of Jesus Christ, the only, one, holy and sufficient sacrifice that could fulfill it.

And then it is that Jesus comes to indwell His people through His Holy Spirit. He is received into the human heart. He comes and takes up residency within our heart and within our life. The story of His love in His death on the cross opens the stout gate of our heart and then Jesus enters in Himself. The perfectly obedient, Son of the Living God, comes to live in us. Abide in Christ. And now when God looks at us, God doesn't see our sin, our failings and our faults, our shortcomings and our disobedience to His law...now God looks into our heart and sees only His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and His obedience and His righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees in us, His perfect sacrifice atoning for our sin. God sees Jesus alive within our heart...and the angel of death passes over...and the law is fulfilled in HIM, in us....and God remembers our sin no more...and HE grants us that which we lost in the fall in the Garden, He grants us restored and perfect relationship with Himself through His Son and eternal life through Jesus Christ, as a gift. That's what it means to be THE CHURCH OF THE COVENANT.

Jesus Christ IS the fulfillment of the law and the Old Testament Covenants. This cup HE offers us tonight IS the cup of the NEW COVENANT in His blood. When you drink of it there is no more curse, only blessing. When you take Jesus within your heart you eat and drink righteousness and His fulfillment of God's law. When you receive Jesus Christ He comes to grant you perfect, restored relationship with His Father in heaven...and life and new life and abundant life and eternal life in HIM.

It is my belief that the NEW COVENANT is **unconditional**—that Jesus Christ has done for us what we could never hope to do for ourselves—that HE has fulfilled the law for us on our behalf. It is finished. It is completed. It is fulfilled by what Jesus did at Calvary. Praise God, praise God and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*